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RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TASHKENT 001273

SIPDIS
DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN
AMEMBASSY ASTANA PASS TO USOFFICE ALMATY
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG

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SUBJECT: Uzbekistan: Former K2 Employee Describes Conditions in Karshi

CLASSIFIED BY: Steven Prohaska, Second Secretary, State, Pol-Econ;
REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

Local Man Describes K2: Past and Present

11. (C) During a personal trip to Karshi on July 18-19, Poloff met with Furkat Tulqin, who worked at the U.S.'s Karshi-Khanabad (K2) Airbase as a procurement officer and interpreter between 2003 and 12005. Tulqin said that some 2,000 Uzbek citizens-mainly from Kashkadarya Province but also from other cities in Uzbekistan-had worked at K2. Since the base's closure in 2005, some of these former employees had moved to Kandahar, Mazar-i-Sharif, and Kabul in Afghanistan. Others have been able to find work with a Swedish-Uzbek oil and gas joint venture called "Gissarneftgaz." Some were also working in local government, health care, education, and telecommunications. Tulqin and three of his former colleagues at K2 now work for Uzbekistan's "Beeline" cell phone company, which Tulqin indicated must pay a percentage (unspecified) of its profits to President Karimov's daughter, Gulnora Karimova. Most of Uzbekistan's former K2 employees, however, remain unemployed.

12. (C) Tulqin later drove Poloff close to the site of Karshi-Khanabad Airbase. On the way to the site, Poloff observed a slew of military equipment-including air defense radars and surface-to-air missile systems-in place to the right of the road. Tulqin drove him close to the first armed checkpoint near the base, and indicated that two more checkpoints lay beyond this at 500-meter intervals. Military, police, and National Security Service officers remain at the site and the Government of Uzbekistan continues to use the base area, he said. He also noted that several months ago, rumors had begun circulating among Karshi locals-particularly among Uzbek servicemen and police-that Karshi Khanabad Airbase might reopen, to which Poloff responded that he was unaware of any such plans. Citing remarks from a contact who is a doctor in Uzbekistan's armed forces, Tulqin said that Russia had wanted to occupy the airbase but that the Government of Uzbekistan had denied this request.

13. (C) Tulqin as well as another former K2 employee complained to Poloff that jobs were harder to come by in Karshi now and indicated that Karshi residents had appreciated the base's presence. Tulqin noted that many Uzbeks-from Karshi and elsewhere in the country-generally travel to Russia during the summer for work, but he added that construction there had recently slowed down and many Uzbeks had been unable to return. He said that a friend of his at Western Union had noted a decline in remittances this year relative to last year. Tulqin remarked that housing in Karshi was far cheaper now. He had spent years saving enough money to purchase a two-bedroom apartment for 15,000 USD, but the price for such an apartment had dropped this year to only 10,000 USD.

Comment:

14. (C) Tulqin painted a grimmer picture of conditions in Karshi than Karshi's hokimiyat officials did during the visit of Embassy staff to the province this spring. Rumors currently circulating around Karshi about the base reopening probably stem from the populace's misunderstanding of the purpose of Embaffs' recent

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travel to the region-which included USG visits to Defense Threat Reduction Agency-funded laboratories, meetings with provincial government and education officials to discuss local conditions, and medical training conducted by U.S. Army personnel at Karshi's NCO Academy-and reflect wishful thinking on the part of Karshi residents who are contending with the apparent dearth of employment opportunities in the province. Nevertheless, some of his other claims-such as his statements about difficulties for Uzbek migrant workers and Gulnora Karimova's business practices-do track with what we have heard from other sources.

BUTCHER